

V · Comparison of the Indigenous Modernity of Donghak and Daesoon Thought 1. Comparison of the Indigenous Modernity of the View of Heaven (天觀)

Comparison of the Indigenous Modernity in Views of Heaven

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Research Background and Purpose

In the East Asian ideological tradition, the 'View of Heaven (天觀)' is the core axis that explains the relationships among Heaven, Earth, and humanity. It is the fundamental perspective that defines the cosmological worldview and the meaning of human existence.

Research Background

- ◆ Donghak and Daesoon Thought are Korean thought systems that arose indigenously in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- ◆ Both thoughts inherit traditional thought while constructing their own distinctive systems of the View of Heaven.
- ◆ Laying the foundation for an indigenous modernity in a manner different from Western modernity.
- ◆ Existing research lacks a comprehensive comparative study centered on the View of Heaven.

Research Purpose

- ◆ Illuminating the differences and developmental patterns between the concepts of Samjae (三才) and Samgye (三界)
- ◆ Comparing the ideological origins and meanings of the concepts of Former Heaven (先天) and Later Heaven (後天)
- ◆ Reassessing the contemporary significance of the indigenous modernity of the two thoughts.
- ◆ Expanding the academic significance of View-of-Heaven research in the history of Korean thought.

Category	Donghak Thought	Daesoon Thought
Principal scriptures	Donggyeong Daejeon, Yongdam Yusa	Jeon-gyeong, Daesoon Jinrihoe Yoram
Central concept of the View of Heaven (天觀)	Sicheonju (侍天主), the Heavenly Lord (天主)	Samgye (三界), the Realm of Divine Beings (神明界)
Orientation of worldview	Doro-seoncheon (restorative)	the Later Heaven Gaebyeok (progressive)

Comparison of the Concepts of Samjae (三才) and Samgye (三界)

In East Asian thought, 'Samjae' was a basic cosmological principle, but in Daesoon Thought it developed into a more systematic worldview called 'Samgye.'

The Concept of Samjae (三才)

- ◆ The three beings of Heaven (天), Earth (地), and Humanity (人)
- ◆ The basic framework of East Asian traditional philosophy
- ◆ Mainly referred to as the constituent elements of the universe; in Donghak,
- ◆ the role of a transcendent Heaven (天) is emphasized; an attribute-
- ◆ centered concept that values relationality

The Concept of Samgye (三界)

- ◆ The realms of the Heavenly Realm (天界), the Earthly Realm (地界), and the Human Realm (人界)
- ◆ A conceptual system established within Daesoon Thought
- ◆ Developed into a systematic, substantive worldview
- ◆ Emphasis on connectivity with the Realm of Divine Beings (神明界)
- ◆ Emphasis on the independence and interactivity of each realm (界)

Category	Samjae (三才)-centered worldview	Samgye (三界)-centered worldview
Principal ideological source	The Zhouyi (周易), Eastern traditional thought	Daesoon truth, Daoist and Buddhist influences
Characteristics of world composition	Emphasis on interrelationship and attribute	Emphasis on an independent worldview and systematic substance
Principal principle	The harmony of yin and yang, the principle of change	Interaction with divine beings (神明), the Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth (天地公事)
Indigenous modernity	Human-centered, egalitarian thought	Divine-human cooperation (神人協力), the harmony of the Three Realms

The Characteristics and Significance of Samgye in Daesoon Thought

In Daesoon Thought, Samgye (三界) goes beyond a mere conceptual classification; closely connected to the Realm of Divine Beings (神明界), it constructs a distinctive worldview endowed with divine substantiality and systematic continuity.

Characteristics of Samgye

- ◆ An organically integrated system of the Heavenly, Earthly, and Human Realms
- ◆ Each realm (界) is an independent yet interconnected substantive system
- ◆ The site and medium in which divine beings (神明) act
- ◆ The integrative character of Eastern attribute-theory and Western substance-theory
- ◆ The possibility of transformation through Samgye-gongsa (三界公事)

Instances of Samgye Within the Jeon-gyeong (典經)

- ◆ Samgye-gongsa (三界公事): the Works that bring about the Gaebyeok of the Three Realms of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity
- ◆ Samgye-jijon (三界之尊): the supreme being who presides over the Three Realms
- ◆ Samgye-daegwon (三界大權): the supreme authority governing the Three Realms
- ◆ Samgye-bokma (三界伏魔): the action of rectifying the disorder of the Three Realms
- ◆ Samgye-gaebyeok (三界開闢): the total transformation of the Three Realms

"That the Three Realms had not been opened is because, in the Former Heaven, mutual conflict governed human affairs, so that grievances piled up and up in the world and filled the Three Realms; thus Heaven and Earth lost the constant Way (常道), and all manner of calamities arose, and the world became wretched."

- Jeon-gyeong, Reordering Works (Gongsa)
Chapter 1, Section 3

Connection to the Realm of Divine Beings

The Heavenly, Earthly, and Human Realms are organically connected through the deity of divine beings (神明).

Systematic continuity

The integration of the attribute-theoretical and substance-theoretical perspectives

The fusion of Eastern and Western thought

Comparison of the Worldviews of Donghak and Daesoon Thought

Donghak's worldview

- ◆ A transcendent View of Heaven - valuing the concepts of Cheonoecheon (天外天) and the Heavenly Lord (天主)
- ◆ The concept of the Earthly Paradise - realizing an ideal earthly world
- ◆ Pursuing human liberation through Boguk-anmin (輔國安民)
- ◆ Sicheonju (侍天主) thought - serving the Heavenly Lord within the person
- ◆ Doro-seoncheon (道路先天) - a worldview of returning to the origin

Daesoon Thought's worldview

- ◆ Samgye (the Heavenly, Earthly, and Human Realms), a systematized world structure; the
- ◆ Realm of Divine Beings (神明界): establishing its existential status
- ◆ the Later Heaven Gaebyeok (後天開闢) - advocating a new world order; the harmony of the divine and the human (神人調化) - the harmonious relationship between the divine and humanity
- ◆ Haewon-sangsaeng (解冤相生) - the resolution of cosmic grievance and coexistence

Category	Donghak Thought	Daesoon Thought
View of Heaven (天觀)	• Emphasis on the Heavenly Lord (天主) and Cheonoecheon (天外天) • Heaven as a transcendent absolute • "Heaven is the mind, and the mind is Heaven"	• The Heavenly Realm (天界) and the Realm of Divine Beings (神明界) • The concept of the Supreme God of the Ninth Heaven (九天上帝) • Systematic Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth (天地公事)
View of Earth (地觀)	• The realization of the Earthly Paradise • Social reform centered on the present world • The practical character of the peasant movement	• The independent existence of the Earthly Realm (地界) • The Reordering Works of the Underworld (冥府公事) • The building of the Earthly Paradise (地上仙境)
View of Humanity (人間觀)	• Innaecheon (人乃天) - the human being is Heaven • The equality of all people and human dignity • The subject of moral practice	• The Human Realm (人界) and the exaltation of the human (人尊) • The harmony of the divine and the human (神人調化) • The subject of Dotong-jingyeong (道通眞境)

Whereas Donghak emphasized a transcendent View of Heaven and a human-centered worldview, Daesoon Thought presented a new cosmology grounded in the organic integration of the Three Realms and the existential value of the Realm of Divine Beings.

The Difference Between the Concepts of Former Heaven (先天) and Later Heaven (後天)

Category	Donghak	Daesoon Thought
Core concept	Doro-seoncheon (道路先天): returning to the origin, past-oriented	the Later Heaven Gaebyeok (後天開闢): the creation of a new order, future-oriented
View of the Divine (神觀)	The Heavenly Lord (天主), the Supreme God (上帝); centered on Sicheonju (侍天主)	Mugeuksin (無極神), Tae-eul-cheonsang-wongun (太乙天上元君); the systematization of the Realm of Divine Beings (神明界)
Worldview	The concept of the Heavenly Lord influenced by Western Learning (西學) combined with traditional thought	The integration of Samgye (三界) and the Realm of Divine Beings, the fusion of Eastern and Western principles (理致)

Donghak's Concept of Former Heaven

Donghak pursues social transformation through a return to Former Heaven

"Sicheonju Johwajeong Yeongsebulmang Mansaji, Jigigeumji Wonwidaegang Sicheonju Johwajeong" - the Incantation of the Donggyeong Daejeon (東經大全)

- The Sicheonju idea that the Heavenly Lord dwells within my mind; grafted onto Buddhist concepts such as 'Tusita Heavenly Lord Maitreya'; use of the term 'Heavenly Lord (天主),' similar to the concept of 'God' in Western religion

Daesoon Thought's Concept of Later Heaven

Daesoon Thought is oriented toward the creation of a new Heaven and Earth (新天地) through the Later Heaven Gaebyeok

"In the Former Heaven, human beings and things are all governed by mutual conflict, so grievance piles up in the world... In the Later Heaven, all under Heaven returns to mutual life-giving (相生)... and it becomes a peaceful world." - Jeon-gyeong, Yesi (Foretelling), Section 81

- The reorganization of the Heavenly Realm (天界); the Gaebyeok Works of the heavens (天文) and the underworld (冥府); the concordance of yin and yang (陰陽合德), the establishment of the Three Powers (三才確立), and the completeness of the Five Phases (五行具備); the fusion of Eastern and Western principles and the establishment of a new cosmic order

Ideological Significance and Comparison of Modernity / Conclusion

The two thoughts show different ways of constructing an indigenous modernity amid the influx of Western civilization and the upheaval of the traditional order in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Category	Donghak	Daesoon Thought
Characteristics of modernity	Emphasizing transcendent values; oriented toward the salvation of the people	The flexibility and integration of the Three Realms; the systematization of the Realm of Divine Beings
Historical orientation	Doro-seoncheon (道路先天): a past-returning aspect	the Later Heaven Gaebyeok (後天開闢): a future-oriented worldview
Relationship between Eastern and Western thought	Blending Eastern transcendence with the concepts of Western Learning (Catholicism)	The fusion of Eastern and Western values; the construction of a distinctive Samgye system

Principal ideological significance

- ◆ Daesoon Thought emphasizes the substantiality and systematic character of Samgye (三界)
- ◆ Through the introduction of the Realm of Divine Beings, it realizes an integrated system of Eastern and Western substance and attribute
- ◆ Donghak is a people (民)-centered revolutionary soteriology; Daesoon is a Reordering Works of Heaven and Earth centered on Sincerity, Reverence, and Faith (誠敬信)
- ◆ Both thoughts present a distinctive path distinct from Western modernity

Principal cited scriptures

- Donghak: the Donggyeong Daejeon (東經大全), the Yongdam Yusa (龍潭遺詞) - the concepts of Sicheonju and the Heavenly Lord
- Daesoon: the Jeon-gyeong (典經) - "the Three Realms of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity could not communicate with one another"
- Daesoon: the Daesoon Jinrihoe Yoram - the concepts of Samgye-gongsa and Samgye-jijon; Dae-
- ◆ -soon: the Basic Principles of Podeok and Gyohwa - the systematization of the concept of the Realm of Divine Beings

Conclusion

Donghak and Daesoon Thought each constructed an indigenous modernity through a different View of Heaven. Donghak did so through a transcendent Heavenly Lord and the practice of Boguk-anmin, while Daesoon Thought did so through the construction of a new world order by means of the Three Realms and the Realm of Divine Beings, forming a distinctive current in the history of modern Korean thought. These differences and developments in the View of Heaven provide an important point of comparison for contemporary East Asian thought studies.

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